



Senator Bob Oke

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Senate Standing Committees:

- Natural Resources, Parks & Shorelines, Ranking Republican
- Transportation



2002 Legislative Review



A REPORT TO THE CITIZENS OF THE 26TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

Dear Neighbor:

The 2002 session ended on both a high note and a low note. First and foremost, safe and dependable passage across the Narrows will now become a reality. The measure providing for public financing and a public toll authority for a new Narrows Bridge has been signed into law.

I have sent a formal request to our members of Congress asking for help in getting federal dollars to help pay for the bridge. The Narrows Bridge corridor is and will continue to be a vital link between Puget Sound's military installations. The federal government should have a national defense interest in keeping this roadway accessible at all times.

The low note of the session is that the 2002 budget hole was patched with band-aids and we will face the same crisis in 2003. I did not vote for the 2002 supplemental budget. It made unnecessary, hurtful cuts to our state's most vulnerable citizens; and it mortgaged the state's future on the success of tobacco companies. More about this inside.

In this newsletter, I also share with you information about my effort to stop tobacco companies from attracting our children to their deadly product; about new laws on transportation efficiencies; about new group fishing permits; and several other new laws I believe will be of interest to you and others in our community. I hope you will find this newsletter informative. I welcome your feedback, ideas and thoughts on how we can make our state a better place to live and work. It is a privilege and an honor to serve as your state senator.

Sincerely,

A stylized, handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bob".



SAFE AND DEPENDABLE PASSAGE ACROSS THE NARROWS

The new Narrows Bridge is now a publicly-financed project. This means that the money borrowed to build the bridge will be backed by the state’s good credit history and will give us access to the lowest possible interest rates.

It is hard to pin down exactly what this means in savings. In 2001, House transportation staff estimated around \$400 million. All of the state’s 13 toll bridges have been paid off early.

- Current capacity will increase by 70 percent. The new span will be 50 percent wider than the existing bridge and have a 10-foot pedestrian-bicycle lane.
- The foundation and super structure will support double decking in the future if needed.
- Electronic transponders will be used so commuters will not have stop at the toll booth.
- Car-pool lanes on the bridges won’t take effect until transit lanes are completed from Nalley Valley to at least Olympic Drive NW.
- Traffic will be one-way on each bridge, with shoulders that can be used by emergency vehicles to get through traffic and so disabled vehicles can pull out of traffic.
- Once the new bridge is finished, its “52-year-old sister” will be reconfigured from four lanes to three; and will carry traffic only one-way, westbound to Gig Harbor. The work on the existing bridge will take about one year.



To view my 2002 Narrows Bridge Update report, visit my web page located at <http://www.src.wa.gov/members/Oke26>



After signing the Narrows Bridge bill into law, Governor Locke presented Senator Oke with the pen and a handshake.

Beginning in mid to late May, the Narrows Bridge web site will provide project updates, and live web camera coverage of construction when it begins in September. www.tacomannarrowsbridge.com

Citizens Advisory Committee

The governor will appoint a nine-member panel of citizens from the affected area to work closely with the Transportation Commission, the public body that will set the tolls, and advise the commissioners on all matters relating to tolls. Tolls will begin when the new span is complete.

State Investment Holds Firm

The 1999-01 transportation budget invested \$50 million in state dollars for property acquisition and the approaches on each side of the new bridge — to Jackson on the east, and to 36th Street on the west. This money remains in the project.

Existing Bridge Maintenance State Responsibility

Operations, maintenance, upkeep and repairs to the existing bridge will be paid for out of state funds. Only the seismic retrofitting and conversion of the existing bridge are part of the new construction project.

FREE CIGARETTES, A DEADLY TRAP FOR TEENS

This year I won passage in the Senate of a bill that would outlaw the giving away of cigarette samples — a practice that has increased in our state by 130 percent since the November 1998 national tobacco settlement.

According to reports filed by the seven tobacco companies that engage in tobacco sampling in Washington, for the six-month period between July 1, 2001 and December 31, 2001, more than 568,000 free cigarettes and 27,249 free cans of chewing tobacco were handed out in our state.

Among the places these giveaways took place are The Gorge Amphitheater, fairs and festivals, raceways, and rodeos. All of these venues attract many teens who melt into the crowd along with the adults and the people giving out cigarettes.

Enforcement is a Huge Concern

According to a proviso in the tobacco settlement, these give-aways are supposed to be limited to adult facilities and in certain designated areas. This is a huge “loop-hole” because adult facilities does not mean “adults only,” and the agreement not to give tobacco products to minors is impossible to enforce, according to the state Liquor Control Board. Although charged with enforcement of the state’s tobacco laws, this agency provided testimony that it simply does not have the funding or manpower to responsibly and effectively monitor sampling events.

Cigarette Addiction Facts

Eighty-two percent of today’s adult smokers started before age 18. Three thousand kids start smoking everyday and 1,000 of those kids will die from the hazards of smoking. Over 400,000 Americans die each year from tobacco use.

We Need a Total Ban on Sampling

We all know that tobacco is as addictive as other street drugs, and that cigarettes are extremely difficult to give up once a person starts smoking. This is why it is so important that young people never start. It is illegal for persons under 18 to possess and use tobacco products in this state. We would not tolerate free samples of other drugs or alcohol where teens can gain access, and we shouldn’t tolerate tobacco give-aways. Free cigarettes give the wrong message to teens about illegal drug use.

The only effective way to keep free cigarettes out of the hands of young people is a total ban on tobacco give-aways. My effort to achieve this ban is supported by the Governor, the Lt. Governor, the Speaker of the House, the state Attorney General, the state Department of Health, and local health departments.

Sadly, my bill was killed in the House by tobacco companies creating concerns about the future of rodeos. Tobacco companies help fund rodeos so they can promote their products. But I will not be deterred. This bill is too important and it must become law.

Annual Costs of Tobacco Related Health Problems

Health care expenditures in Washington directly related to tobacco use	\$1.3 billion
Residents’ state and federal tax burden caused by tobacco-related health costs	\$962 million
Washington government Medicaid payments directly related to tobacco use	\$237 million
Number of people who die each year in Washington from tobacco-related illnesses	8,300
According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, each pack of cigarettes sold in the United States costs the nation \$7.18 in medical care and lost productivity . Americans buy about 22 billion packs of cigarettes annually, for a total yearly cost to our society of \$157.7 billion.	

If you want help to stop smoking, you may call toll-free in Washington 1-877-270-STOP (7867) or TTY/TAA 1-877-777-6534.

TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS: THE ROAD TO A VIBRANT ECONOMY

I supported the statewide transportation funding referendum that passed the Legislature this session for the November ballot. I believe it is key to a sustainable, vibrant economy — and is long overdue. Key road projects and four new auto ferries are part of the package.

Here are the 26th District Projects in the Statewide Funding Referendum:

- Highway 16/Interstate 5 — preliminary engineering and construction HOV lane (\$85.8 million)
- Highway 16/36th Street to Olympic Drive NW — construction of HOV lanes (\$8.1 million)
- Highway 304/Highway 3 to Bremerton Ferry — realignment and construction of additional lanes (\$11 million)
- New terminal and new passenger-only ferry service at Southworth (\$37 million)

I did not vote for the three-county regional plan. There is no question that the state's greatest transportation needs are in the central Puget Sound region. However, because of the Narrows Bridge project, Gig Harbor and Key Peninsula residents should be exempt from the new tax options in the regional plan.

I was only a few votes short in the Senate to protect Gig Harbor and Key Peninsula residents from being forced to pay for regional transportation improvements if voters in Snohomish, King and Pierce counties approve any of the available taxing options under the plan.



REMOVING FISH HAZARDS FROM PUGET SOUND

This year, I teamed up with a member of the House of Representatives to win passage of two bills to rid the waters of Puget Sound of abandoned vessels and fishing gear. Both pose great hazards to marine life, but they are difficult for fishers to recover on their own.

Derelict fishing gear entangles and traps marine life. Derelict vessels, estimated at over 100 each year, obstruct navigation and have the potential to release hazardous materials causing fish and marine mammal mortality and environmental damage.

My derelict gear bill encourages people to report lost gear; and requires the Department of Fish & Wildlife to develop guidelines for the safe removal of derelict gear, as well as guidelines to help reduce future gear loss. No hydraulic permit, required for work in water, will be necessary to remove derelict gear.

The House derelict vessel bill provides the authority and processes for state entities to remove and dispose of abandoned vessels. The annual boater education fee and the vessel identification fee are increased, and the new revenue is deposited in a fund to help pay for the removal of derelict vessels.

TRANSPORTATION EFFICIENCY & REFORM HIGHLIGHTS

This year, several efficiency and reform recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation were rolled into one bill and have become law. To me, implementing these cost and time saving steps are just as crucial to transportation as passing a funding package.

- The Transportation Commission is required to establish specific performance measures with benchmark categories adopted by the Blue Ribbon Commission.
- The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is authorized to contract out for engineering services.
- The Department of Labor & Industries is required to conduct an assessment of current practices used in setting prevailing wages for transportation trades.
- WSDOT must phase in the development of transportation demand modeling tools to measure the costs and benefits of investments across transportation modes.
- WSDOT must conduct a corridor analysis for projects that exceed \$100 million to examine strategies for relieving congestion.
- Funding for mobility improvements must be allocated to the worst traffic chokepoints in the state.
- WSDOT must use cost-effective pavement surfaces.
- The County Road Administration Board must develop a model maintenance management system for counties; and counties, cities, public transportation benefit areas, and regional transit authorities must provide maintenance and preservation management plans to the Transportation Commission.

An additional bill that was signed into law requires that local jurisdictions integrate transportation planning with land use planning to reduce both traffic and investment costs.

As a precursor to this year's comprehensive effort to do a better job at saving money and bringing projects online faster, in 2001 we approved a measure to streamline the environmental permit process for transportation projects.

GROUP FISHING PERMITS

I've always enjoyed fishing — as a boy and as a adult. It is a great recreational opportunity for children and their parents to share. Fishing teaches coordination in movements and patience! It is also a fun way to enjoy the outdoors that people should not lose just because they may have some disability or are elderly.

This year, I introduced a bill that that will give family members or caregivers of persons in state authorized care facilities to fish as a group without getting individual licenses. This new law also makes nonprofit facilities eligible for group fishing permits.

In addition, any handicapped person or seriously or terminally ill person who is dependent on the state because of emotional or physical disabilities may participate under a group fishing permit.

The group permits may be used in open seasons. The state Fish & Wildlife Commission will adopt rules governing how the group fishing permits are issued.

Thanks to the young people from the 26th District who served as my Senate Pages this year.

- Erin Christensen — Explorer Academy
- Jessica Fisher — South Kitsap High School
- Kelsey Shardelman — Peace Luthern School
- Molly Palmersheim — St. Charles Borromeo
- Brent Tulloch — Covenant High School
- Sarah Doughty — Home Schooled
- Brian Jack — Home Schooled
- Daniel Denman — Home Schooled

STATE PARKS

The 2002 Supplemental Operating Budget assumes a \$1.5 million savings by the temporary closure (through Fiscal Year 2005) of 13 state parks which are actually owned by either another government entity or a public utility district, but which are operated with state dollars. Two of these parks are located in Western Washington: Lake Cushman and Ike Kinswa — both owned by Tacoma Power & Light. The state Parks & Recreation Commission is currently negotiating with the landowners in hopes of keeping the parks open through 2005. However, they will remain open this year through October 1 and all reservations will be honored

In addition, the budget reduces the 2001-03 parks enhancement by \$500,000 and assumes that the Commission will take a variety of actions to reduce operating cost for an additional savings of \$500,000 through the end of the 2001-03 biennium.

To increase revenue, the Parks & Recreation Commission raised overnight camping fees by \$2.00 effective April 15, 2002. However, any reservations paid in full by April 15 will not be assessed the increase. Also effective April 15, 2002: Trailer dumping fees increased from \$3.00 to \$5.00; and boat launch fees increased from \$3.00 or \$4.00 to \$5.00.

Task Force on Funding

Funding for our state parks continues to be a tough issue to resolve — but they are so important to our families. We faced the possibility of massive park closures a few years back, and day-use fees were approved by the Commission, but never imposed. Since this is an area of special concern to me, I will be serving on the Task Force on The Funding of State Parks and Outdoor Recreation that was created this year.

Our job will be to produce recommendations for the 2003 Legislature on improving the operation of state parks and outdoor recreation programs, and securing adequate funding on a permanent basis. I welcome any ideas you may have on how we can ensure that this special part of living in Washington is guaranteed for generations to come.

WE COULD HAVE CHOSEN “THE RIGHT APPROACH”

This year the budget deficit was patched with band-aids; and keeping the state operating for the remainder of the current biennium was mortgaged on tobacco companies being successful. As a result, come next January the Legislature will have to adopt a two-year budget set against another budget hole - anticipated to be about \$1 billion dollars.

I voted against the budget, it is the wrong way to do business. I also voted against the bill to allow the Legislature to spend money from the state's emergency reserve fund on a simple majority vote. This bill amended Initiative 601, which voters approved and which requires a two-thirds vote of the Legislature to spend emergency reserve dollars.

By bonding a portion of the forthcoming tobacco settlement money, we will get cash faster, but only about 25-cents on the dollar.

Our emergency reserve fund was almost depleted and we are relying on federal dollars that may or may not materialize.

The three annual training days for teachers to help them prepare for greater responsibility and accountability were cut to two.

I supported a different plan. We had before us a proposal that preserved essential services and eliminated unnecessary expenditures — we dubbed it “The Right Approach”.

This plan used a variety of methods to reduce state employment costs by \$258 million (including House and Senate budgets); and gave agency heads the authority to contract out for services where savings to taxpayers would result.

The proposal also instituted a “Best Practices Model” for providing health care coverage to state employees. Those at the higher end of the pay scale would pay more of the premium than those at the lower end. Instead, all employees will be paying more, and the overall savings to the state will be less than we could have achieved with the sliding scale.

BILLS THAT DIDN'T MAKE THE “MEDIA SPOTLIGHT”

Every year the media reports heavily on the major issues facing the Legislature. This year it was transportation and the budget crisis that crowded all the legislative news stories. However, I work on or lend my support to a lot of bills that make a difference in someone's life here in our community. Here are brief summaries of some of these new laws:

- Dept. of Fish and Wildlife officers now have “general authority” which means they can be a much greater help to rural law enforcement efforts.
- Local jurisdictions may work together to provide jail facilities on a regional basis so the facilities needed can be provided at less cost.
- The prohibition against new taxes and fees on Internet service is extended to July 1, 2004.
- The definition of “veteran” for peacetime service is expanded for purposes of veteran's preference on civil service exams, free license plates, county aid to indigent veterans, and county burials.
- School districts may issue diplomas to WWII veterans who were unable to finish high school due to military service.
- School districts can now do more capital projects using alternative public works contracting procedures that save time and money.
- Cities and counties are given a deadline extension to do the required September 2002 update of their land use plans.
- Christmas trees grown on agricultural land are excluded from the Forest Practices Act.
- Ships coming into our waters from other areas of the world bring with them non-native, and sometimes very harmful species of marine life in the ballast water they take on from their point of origin and dump when they come into our ports. A ballast water work group was established this year to expedite safe industry standards for ballast water exchange on open seas.
- Commercial fishers were given a direct retail endorsement this year to allow direct sales to the public without going through a wholesaler.
- Car thieves will get longer jail sentences from now on — especially those who operate car theft rings. The penalties are tough, but fair. In addition to the grief of people who have their car stolen, innocent people are hurt or even killed when car thieves try to elude police.
- An insurer cannot cancel or refuse to renew a policy due to a consumer's credit history or credit score and can use credit history only in combination with other substantive underwriting factors. Consumers must be notified when credit history is the bases for adverse action and coverage cannot be denied based upon absence of credit history.



IMPROVING WASHINGTON'S JOBS AND BUSINESS CLIMATE

This year, we had many proposals before us that came from a Senate Republican business listening tour and from the Governor's Competitiveness Council on how to make our state more "user-friendly" for businesses of all sizes so the private sector can retain and create more good-paying jobs that will help lead our state out of the current financial crisis.

We looked at simple changes, such as agency attitude toward new business ventures (known as customer service in the private sector). We looked at huge changes, like delaying new rules and regulations until the Legislature meets in session and can hear from employers and employees about the potential impacts.

Overall, my Republican colleagues and I in the Senate tried to enact measures that focused on three themes: Attitude — Predictability — Accountability. Several of our more important measures did get through the Senate.

Unfortunately, the budget crisis overshadowed everything else of major concern; and a lot of good legislation must wait for another day.

NEW CONSTRUCTION NEW JOBS

The supplemental capital construction budget we approved this year saves or creates 4,000 jobs. In our community, \$4.8 million will be made available for five projects.

- Bremerton Maritime Park — restoration of boardwalk and piers
- Sehmel Homestead (Gig Harbor) — acquisition of land for active and passive recreation
- Olympic Community College — repairs to ventilation, heating/cooling system
- Bremerton Readiness Center/Armory — additional classrooms to support emergency services training
- Port Orchard Readiness Center/Armory — seismic upgrade

In addition, Retsil, home to many veterans in Kitsap County, will get \$16.5 million in state matching dollars for the \$30.7 million federal grant to build a new 240-bed skilled nursing facility.

Across the state, the public works bill we approved this year will provide 2,500 new jobs. The **City of Port Orchard** will receive \$10 million to upgrade its sewage treatment plant, including physical, chemical and biological treatment processes. **The Tacoma Narrows Bridge project will create 500 new jobs for Puget Sound residents.**



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WASHINGTON STATE SENATOR • 26th LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

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